



Written Testimony of  
Bishop John Selders  
Co-Founder of Moral Monday CT  
Before the Public Health Committee  
On Legislation  
of S.B. 1 - An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and  
Physical Health  
Care in Response to the Pandemic

March 17, 2021

Good Day Senator Daugherty Abrams (Co-Chair), Representative Steinberg (Co-Chair) and Members of the Public Health Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly. My name is John Selders of Hartford, CT, Pastor of Amistad United Church of Christ, Hartford, CT and Co-Founder of Moral Monday CT, a statewide group of persons of faith and conscious doing our work at the intersection of social justice and the Movement for Black Lives.

I along with many of my colleagues with Moral Monday CT support the passing of **S.B. 1 - An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic**, specifically Section 6 and 7 declaring racism as a public health crisis in the state and establish a commission to study the impact of institutional racism on public health charged with rendering recommendations back to the Connecticut General Assembly for further considerations.

The senseless and continuous deaths of and violence against Black, Brown and Indigenous people at the hands of police and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in Connecticut have certainly made it clear that the historic and ever-present impact racism has and is having needs specific and intentional policy remedy.

While there are a number of understandings and interpretations of the term racism, there is something deeply imbedded in the fabric of this country that shows up as violence with reference to racial understandings found in the practice of traditions, beliefs, opinions, and myths ingrained in one's cultural paradigm, where such traditions, beliefs, opinions, and myths have been not only practiced but sustained for so long, they are accepted as common facts, understood to be normal behavioral practices in effect marginalizing, demonizing and perpetrating violence on the human worth and value of others based on skin color. At its most basic level, racism is problematic because access and a person's value should not be determined by the color of someone's skin.

Yet, the moral failings of a society grounded in such superficial terms, racism is detrimental to our health in incalculable ways. The data is quite compelling. Black women are up to four times more likely to die of pregnancy related complications than white women. Black men are more than twice as likely to be killed by police as white men. And the average life expectancy of African Americans is four years lower than the rest of the U.S. population according to the Pew Research's Stateline.

S.B. 1 is an opportunity for our state to lead the pursuit for racial justice with action. Please consider the following recommendations:

- The name of the commission be changed to be reflective of its work, "The Connecticut Commission on Racial Impact and Reconciliation."
- A commitment to 2 members of the proposed commission be persons of color, residing in a major city of Connecticut with an annual income of less than \$65,000 creating a total of 12 commission members.
- Expand racial/ethnic data collection to expose disparities in communities.
- A review and reform of the legislative process to improve public accessibility and set in place mechanism to determine the impact of proposed legislation on race.
- Training for OLR and OFA to create racial and ethnic impact assessments.
- Establishing a clear racial equity approach in policies set forth by the executive branch.

I believe it is time to comes to terms with what many of us have being advocating for from across this state. We have this moment, right now, to forward something new. Let us do it, together.

In closing, I urge you to support **S.B. 1 An Act Equalizing Comprehensive Access to Mental, Behavioral and Physical Health Care in Response to the Pandemic.**

Thank you for your consideration.